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HINDU VISHVA

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BIDDING GOODBYE TO 2020



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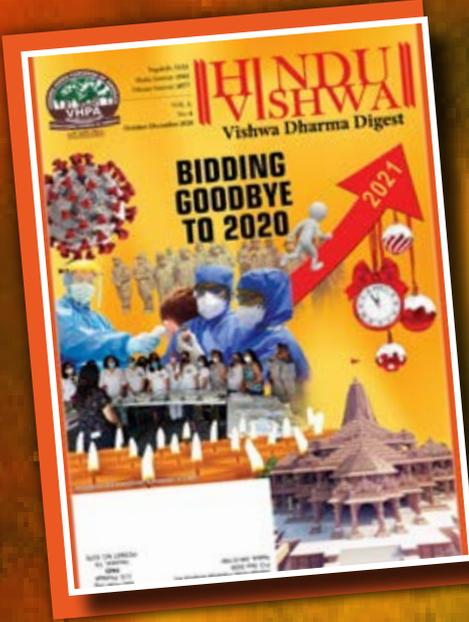
www.vhp-america.org

Tel.: 732-744-0851
office@vhp-america.org

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Managing Editor:

Shyam Tiwari

srtiwari@hotmail.com

Editor:

Ronica (Rajranee) Jaipershad

ronica@ronica.com

Advisor:

Dr. Abhay Asthana

abhayaji@gmail.com

श्रीभगवानुवाच

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।
अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥

-श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता 6.35

śhrī bhagavān uvācha

*asanśhayam mahā-bāho mano durnigraham chalam
abhyāsena tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa cha gṛihyate*

-BHAGVAD GITA 6.35

Lord Krishna said: O mighty-armed son of Kunti, what you say is correct; the mind is indeed very difficult to restrain. But by practice and detachment, it can be controlled.

About the HINDU VISHWA

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For Advertising inquiries please contact: Shyam Tiwari @ 7709622669 or email: srtiwari@hotmail.com

World Hindu Council of America (VHPA), founded in 1970 and incorporated in the state of New York in 1974, is an independent, nonprofit, tax-exempt and volunteer-based charitable organization serving the needs of Hindu community in USA. It aims to build a dynamic and vibrant Hindu society rooted in the eternal values of Dharma and inspired by the lofty ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, i.e. "the entire creation is one family".

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PROMISES SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN

Our Hindu events are designed with a purpose: Not so long ago, on Saturday, November 14, Hindus celebrated the annual festival of Diwali, or, the festival of lights. This is a period when Hindus worship Mother Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, and fill their homes and surroundings, with earthen lamps (diyas), and happiness! This event provides an opportunity to focus on Mother Lakshmi, and to ensure that their respective abodes will be visible when the Mother passes by, on Diwali night. On this occasion, families get together, for prayers and unification, and for the opportunity to begin the Hindu new year together. They share sweets, join together for prayers, and reflect on their past, with a resolve to ensure that in the upcoming year, life will be better, goodness will prevail, and darkness will be overcome.

Similar festivities are visible during holidays in December, and New Year's Eve, an event which marks the last day of the calendar year, and the beginning of a new year. This day is celebrated lavishly, with pomp and pageantry. We celebrate our achievements and accomplishments with families and friends, and make promises to each other, with a resolve to foster a brighter and better future, in the upcoming year.

However, as time goes by, we all have seen instances, wherein, as the new year goes by, the resolutions are sometimes forgotten. Good does not always prevail over evil, and the unwanted inevitably occurs. Some families even become divided, due to various discords that occur within the family unit. This should not be the case. Promises and resolves are not to be broken, or forgotten. Conceptually it's all about a sankalp, whether it's for



performing a pooja at home or something else, to remain steadfast irrespective of interruptions. If you make a promise, or resolve to accomplish some objective, it is essential that you fulfill your obligations.

So, as we approach the end of another year, do follow through with your new year's resolutions, and especially, "be good and true to your words, and to one another!" ■



First **VHPA Hindu Center** Inaugurated in Chicago

On October 24, 2020, the World Hindu Council of America (VHPA) inaugurated its first Hindu Center in the city of Sugar Grove, IL. The occasion was graced by Consul General of Chicago Hon. Amit Kumar and the Mayor of Sugar Grove Hon. Sean Michels who were joined by an intimate group of the organization's leaders and their families.

The Center's mission is to bring the Hindu community together, celebrate Hindu culture and heritage and pass it on to the next generation. As per Hindu tradition, a yagna was performed and presided over by the President of the Chicago Chapter Nirav Patel, Vice Presidents Vinesh Virani and Harindra Mangrola, Secretary Shailesh Rajput, Midwest Coordinator Sanjay Shah, and VHPA Joint General Secretary Amitabh Mittal and their respective spouses. Strict social

distancing norms were maintained including limiting the number of attendees. India's Consul General to Chicago, Amit Kumar congratulated the organization for its efforts in bringing this ambitious project to fruition while Mayor Michels lauded the Indian American community for their substantial contributions to the US.

The Center, located at 200 N. Bond St, Sugar Grove, IL, stands on a 2.7-acre plot of land and has a built-up area of 16,000 sq. feet. The Center will offer numerous services to the Hindu community including Bal-Vihar for children, Vedic Math classes and Women's Self Defense classes among other activities. Center will also be available for social gatherings and office space rentals. ■

*For more information, please contact: Info@vhpachicago.org
or call (224) 388-9122.*

Shri Balkrishna Naik: MERGER OF A NISHKAAM DIVYATMA INTO COSMIC LIGHT



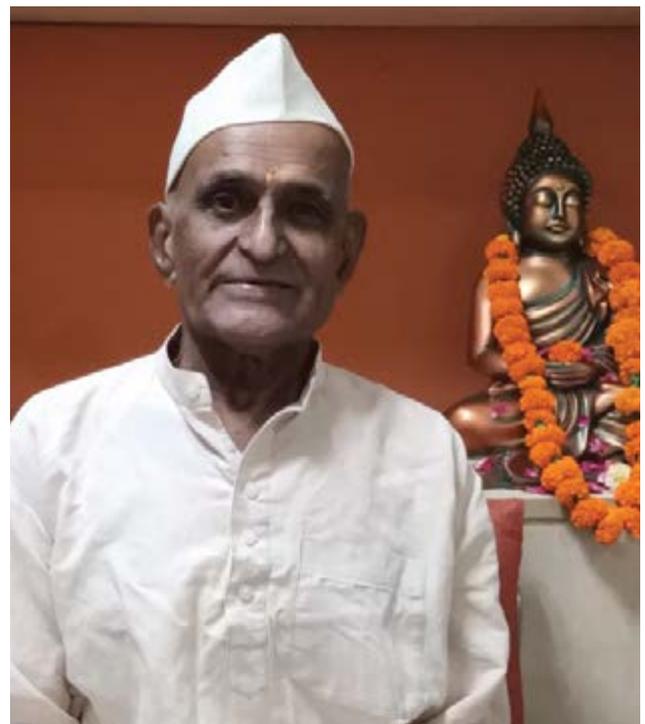
Vinod Bansal

On way from Kushinagar to Gorakhpur (51 km stretch) in Uttar Pradesh at 11.30 p.m. on November 18, 2020, a flame merged into the Param Jyoti (Cosmic Light). Remaining a bachelor, Shri Balakrishna Naik (78) had preferred the lifelong happiness and bliss of selfless service of protecting, preserving and promoting the cause of Desh-Dharma, Rishi-Krishi Kulaachar (culture) and Hindu self-respect to material pleasures and common run of life! He gave up his body at the place which is famous for the Mahaparinirvana (absolute liberation from the limitations of the world of relativity/giving up of body) of Bhagwan Buddha – the Enlightened and Awakened One. Kushinagar is included in the famous Buddhist circuit/trail encompassing Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Nepal. It is said that he had also expressed the wish to attain Nirvana at the same Punyasthali. He also had great reverence for Mahatma Buddha and his principles. Prior to his demise, he had Darshan-Poojan at the Maha-Parinirvana temple of Bhagwan Buddha at

Kushinagar and met venerable Buddhist monks and taken their blessings. He was also associated with the Sri Ramakrishna Math, and Mission work started by Swami Vivekananda.

My last meeting with him was during the meeting of the VHP Central Margdarshak Mandal on 10th November, 2020 in Delhi when he could not stop his desire to have Darshan of venerable saints even in the condition of ill health and infirmity. He had great reverence for venerable Sant-Mahatmas. Ability, integrity and humility were the hallmarks of his personality. He was always peaceful, quiet, cheerful and soft-spoken.

Shri Balakrishna Uttamrao Naik was born



(1942/43) at Paithan, Maharashtra, and his paternal family had later shifted to Sambhajinagar (Aurangabad), Maharashtra. He had been a brilliant student since childhood. He did his Bachelor of Engineering (Mechanical) and stood first in Gujarat University in 1962. He earned his Master of Science in Mechanical Engineering (MSME) from Stanford University, California (USA) and worked as Research Engineer with NARMCO R&D, San Diego, California during 1963-65.

After returning to Bharat, he straight away, without going in for any job/employment for which he was eminently eligible, completely dedicated himself to the service of Maa Bhaarat (Mother India) in 1966 as a Pracharak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) working from Parbhani (Maharashtra). In 1967, he was sent to Kolkata to work for the Hindu cause in West Bengal that was in the sadistic communist stranglehold during those decades, and he effectively worked in W.B. in various roles for 23 years. He was sent to Vishva Hindu Parishad-W.B. in 1974 to work as a Vibhag (a cluster of 3-4 districts) Organizing Secretary and then from 1976 to 1990, he successfully worked as the State Organizing Secretary of VHP-W.B. Later on he was Organizing Secretary for VHP – Western Zone (consisting of Maharashtra and Gujarat) for 5 years. For quite some time since 1995 he ministered the VHP International Coordination work from New Delhi as a Central Secretary. Then as a Joint General Secretary and a Vice-President he worked for the organization which is the global platform for the Hindus of the world

who constitute 1/6th of the over 7.8 billion global population. He was a member of the Central Governing Council of VHP since 2018.

As the head of the International Coordination Department of VHP, he travelled to several European, American, and Caribbean countries including the USA, England, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands (Holland), Norway, Trinidad & Tobago, etc., to mobilise and put in place a mechanism amongst the NRI and the PIO brethren, so that Bharatiya culture and Hindu values of life could be kept being passed and handed on from generation to generation. He

AS THE COORDINATOR OF THE HINDU-BUDDHIST JOINT DELEGATION, HE NOT ONLY TRAVELLED TO COUNTRIES LIKE THAILAND, CAMBODIA, VIETNAM, MYANMAR, NEPAL, BHUTAN, SRI LANKA, INDONESIA, MALAYSIA, SOUTH KOREA, BANGLADESH, SURINAME, LAOS, AND SINGAPORE, BUT ALSO HELPED VEN.

participated in the historic World Hindu Conference held in Trinidad & Tobago in 1999-2000 as the head of the International Coordination Department of VHP.

As the coordinator of the Hindu-Buddhist Joint Delegation, he not only travelled to countries like Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Bangladesh, Suriname, Laos, and Singapore, but also helped Ven. Bhadant Gyanjagat Mahasthavir Ji Maharaj – the head of the Hindu Buddhist Cultural Foundation – organize a Hindu Bauddha Conference at Lumbini – the hallowed birthplace of Bhagwan Buddha. The theme was to reclaim the pristine cultural fraternity and commonwealth status amongst all these countries including Bharat.

For the past 15 years, he had been looking after the work of Samannvay Manch (Solidarity Forum) for protection, preservation and promotion of Bharatiya Culture as its first Head,

and then as its Patron. He was the originator of the Samannvay Manch that aimed at ensuring solidarity amongst all indigenous schools of spirituality, including the Bauddha, Jain, Sikh traditions, etc. He never ever thought of taking a break or retirement due to his uncooperative health (asthma), but by virtue of his continuous cultivation of mind over matter, he always kept on moving and working across the country – in the dynamic Aitareya Upanishadic tradition of “Charaiveti, Charaiveti” – keep on moving ahead discovering, inventing and innovating in the spiritual, material, social and national spheres for the good of one and all.

In his tributes paid to the Divyatma, the VHP Working President Advocate Shri Alok Kumar said that Late Shri Balkrishna Naikji was very much a continuous practitioner of the 18/5 Shloka of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita: “yagna-daana-tapah-karma, na tyajyam kaaryam eva tat, yajno daanam tapas chaiva, paavanaani manisinaam”, meaning, acts of sacrifice, philanthropy and self-discipline verily ought to be performed, and should not be forsaken, for the holy fire rite, charity, and penance sanctify even the wise. (The truly wise inculcate the doctrine of performing the inner holy fire ceremony of casting material consciousness into the fire of inner wisdom; and the metaphysical fire ceremony, the burning of mortal desires in the cosmic perception of God, or destroying material desires in the fire of divine longings. These acts are symbolized in the external yajna of casting clarified butter into the ceremonial fire). He kept his mind and intellect awakened and dynamically creative/productive through regular Vipassana meditation. The Yajna-Daan-Tapa framework very much outlined and defined the agenda of all his activities.

His USA academic peer Shri Oliver Markley has wished him “Rest in Peace” and another USA friend Shri Babulal Gandhi, who was also

his engineering peer at Gujarat University, writes “Jai Shri Ram. We will miss him!” His friend from USA, Engineer Shri Sushim Mukerji writes: “...I was so saddened by the news of the passing of Naikji. He phoned me even a few months ago during this Covid pandemic to enquire my wellbeing. We knew each other from the mid-1980s. In spite of all intellectual and professional qualifications he chose a life far from the societal norm, a life that shunned name and fame and wealth. Gita encourages us to lead a life “vitaraga-bhaya-krodha” (free from attachment-fear-anger); Naikji led that life effortlessly, as if it is so easy. He did not have attachment even for the wellbeing of his own body, which perhaps was the reason he passed so prematurely.

By virtue of his wholesome, chaste and unassuming character, humility, love and sincerity of purpose, he accomplished results and earned respect in all areas of his responsibility. As a Sangh Pracharak, he lived an ascetic life; as an office-bearer of the Vishva Hindu Parishad he made great efforts to establish co-ordination amongst all indigenous schools of spirituality and left his body in harness, while on organizational tour as if he proved true to his regular prayer as a Swayamsevak, i.e., “Mahaamangale punyabhume twadarthe, Patatweshha kaayo Namaste Namaste” (“Oh the supreme benefactor holy land, this body be laid down for You! Many praises for you!”)

It takes a super courageous man to accomplish such a feat. We will miss him! Hari Om!”

Our humble tributes on the merger of a Nishkaam-Jyoti into the Cosmic Prakash-Punj! ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shri Vinod Bansal is the national spokesperson for VHP Bharat.

SUPPORT-A-CHILD STANDS UP TO THE CHALLENGES OF 2020



Jayant Daftardar, Director SAC USA

Support-A-Child (SAC), a Seva program of VHPA, was established in 1985 as an initiative of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), to help eradicate illiteracy and improve living conditions of children from poor and disadvantaged families in India. SAC is run totally by volunteers' efforts, with minimal overhead costs. Today SAC has strong presence in 27 active chapters in 16 states in US, with dedicated chapter coordinators, and a strong national team.

Donors may support a child (or several children) by donating \$250 per child which provides for education and living expenses of the child for a year. Donors receive a report card for each sponsored child every year and are encouraged to visit the SAC supported hostels in India. Please visit sacusa.org to learn more about the initiatives and success stories of SAC.

To ensure "Satpatri Daan", SAC collaborates with various organizations dedicated to serving the poor and needy in India so that help reaches where it is most needed. Some of these organizations are Bharat Kalyan Prathishthan (BKP) (Sewa Vibhag of VHP Bharat), Sewa Bharati, Sewa Dham, Vivekanand Kendra and Seva in Action. Among these, BKP is our main partner which runs several hostels in cities as well as in remote villages and tribal regions of India, where poverty

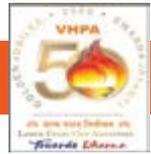
and lack of resources prevent youth from getting any education. To address the needs of this neglected populace, schools have been started in remote areas of Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Jharkhand, Assam, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. Now we see the presence of SAC Supported Hostels in all the states of Bharat. BKP, a project of VHP, with the help of about 200 associated organizations or trusts all over Bharat, is dedicated to jan-kalyan and is an embodiment of the lofty principle of "Nar-seva Narayan-seva."

FUNDRAISING:

The year 2020 posed unique challenges for SAC in organizing the annual fund raising events. After considerable thought, it was decided to host a series of online events on virtual platform using social media.

The first event of this series was Hasya Kavi sammelan' Jeevan ke Rang Hasi Ke Sang featuring renowned poets Gajendra Solanki, Dr. Praveen Shukla, Dr. Sarita Sharma, and Dr. Sunil Jogi on Aug 29. A combination of 'hasya kavita' as well as thought provoking serious poetry, the program was well received by the audience.

"Atithi Devo Bhava" a musical dance drama that rediscovers Bharat through music, dance, and visuals was presented on September 12. This program was previously performed nationally and internationally; notably in front of the Taj Mahal. The program presented the famous traditional and folk dances from



four corners of India, masterfully showcasing the unity in diversity of the Bharat.

The next show was the Grammy nominated tabla and percussion maestro Pt. Subhen Chatterjee and Bandish Fusion band on Oct 10. The show titled Bhava-Rasa-Tala, was a memorable musical experience presenting a unique fusion of Indian and western music, blending Indian classical music with Jazz as well as harmonic influence from European classical music. The band, comprising of talented instrumentalists as well as vocalists, enthralled the audience with their melodic beauty and incredible rhythms.

A unique addition to the SAC fund raising efforts was a youth program “By The Youth – For The Youth.” This was a Music and Dance show by talented teens across America. The program was managed entirely by youth volunteers of SAC from conception to execution. The variety show included vocal, instrumental and dance performances, and highlighted the deep connection of the Indian diaspora with the traditional

art forms of Bharat.

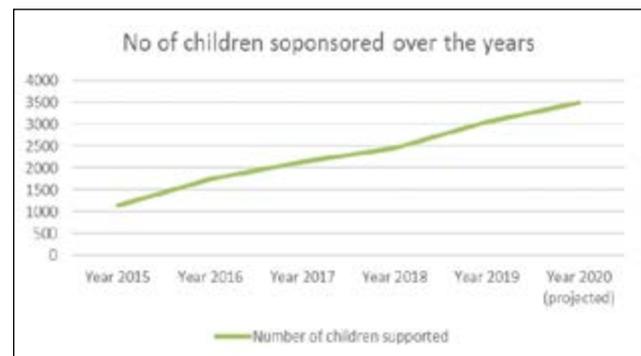
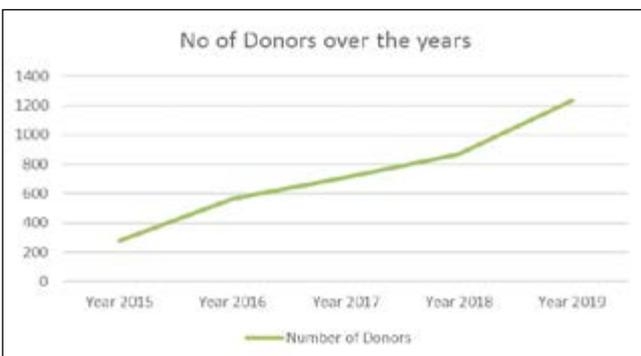
Webinar “Hindus of Kerala Past, Present and Future” was organized on Dec 12 jointly with Swami Vivekanand Cultural Society (SVCS) from Kerala, Bharat. The purpose of the webinar was to highlight the rich and proud history and heritage of Hindus of Kerala and to create awareness about the current challenges faced by the Hindus of Kerala. Webinar also showcased several Sewa initiatives launched by SVCS & SAC for the uplift of Hindu society.

OPERATIONS:

This year, SAC shifted its operations from Houston, TX to Cincinnati, OH. Sangeeta Singh-ji joined us as Office Manager and is ably providing all the backend support. This year has been challenging for everyone due to Covid-19 pandemic, however volunteers of SAC have shown exceptional focus and have continued with the fundraising efforts. Our goal for 2020 is to support 3500 children and we are on track to meet the goal with the generous and unwavering support from our donors. ■

LAST 5-YEAR SAC STATISTICS AT A GLANCE:

	Year 2015	Year 2016	Year 2017	Year 2018	Year 2019
Number of children supported	1139	1738	2139	2464	3064
Number of Donors	276	566	710	867	1236
Number of Hostels	42	59	59	72	75
Number of States in India (Donations Given)	13	15	18	19	20
Number of States in US (Donations Received)	35	35	35	37	37
Total Donations Received	\$ 167,126.00	\$ 379,013.63	\$ 453,488.00	\$ 431,352.10	\$ 535,980.21



HinduPACT Organizes its First Ever Fundraising Gala

To kick-off its 2021 Hindu Policy research and Advocacy CollecTive initiatives, HinduPACT organized a fundraiser gala virtually on Saturday, December 19, 2020 and was hosted on several online platforms.

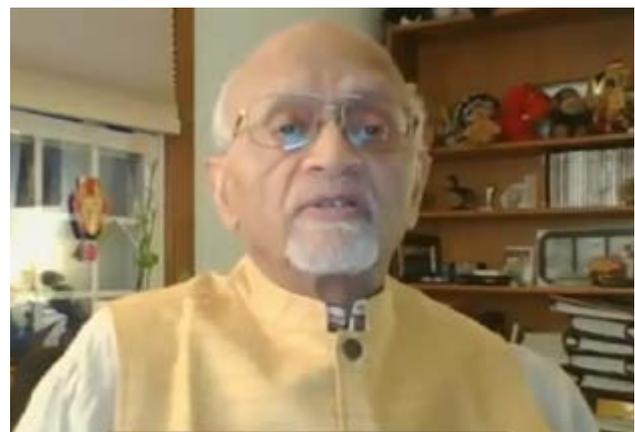
The gala was anchored and hosted by Preity Üpala, a former investment banker and Miss India International, currently a media entrepreneur in Hollywood, CA, a geo-political commentator, columnist, and director of The Omnia Institute.



The program began with a Sri Ganésh stuti, mellifluously sung by Ms. Geetikka Kulkarni, a renowned playback singer (of Bajirao Mastani and other movies fame). The urgent need for partnerships for Hindu Americans to promote Hindu voices and perspectives in the political and cultural landscape of USA was articulated by Ankur Patel, HinduPACT Director for Partnerships, along with introductory remarks. This was followed by felicitations by Dr. Abhaya Asthana, President of Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), and Dr. Ved P. Nanda, John Evans Distinguished University Professor and Thompson G. Marsh Professor of Law, University of Denver.



Dr. Jai Bansal, HinduPACT Executive Director – Education, and former Chief Scientific Officer and Distinguished Fellow at Argonne National Laboratory, provided a brief on Hindu diaspora in USA, the structure of HinduPACT, its current and proposed activities, and financial (donations and/or endowments) needs. Dr. Ajay Shah and Utsav Chakrabarti, HinduPACT Convener and Executive Director, respectively eloquently provided background information.



A very engaging and thought-provoking panel discussion, moderated by Ms. Rakhi Israni, HinduPACT Executive Director – Legal, ensued. It had four prominent Hindu American panelists: Dr. Rik Mehta, Ms. Vindhya Adapa, Dr. Raj Vedam, and Pandit Roopnauth Sharma. It articulated the broad theme of advocating a strong American Hindu voice in the public space that encompasses

political, cultural, and educational arenas. Dr. Raj Vedam, Co-Founder of Indian History Awareness and Research think-tank (Houston, TX) and Director of Arsha Vidya Satsanga, emphasized the necessity of advancing Hindu narratives that are contextualized in their original Puranic traditions. The urgency for countering the distorted colonial and leftist descriptions was also expressed. The latter engendered flagrant Hinduphobia and outright demeaning of Hindu values and cultural identities. These views were further advanced by Pundit Roopnauth Sharma, President of the Hindu Federation, Ontario, Canada, and Ms. Vindhya Adapa, Attorney Advisor – US Dept of Treasury and Formerly Asst. General Counsel for HIAS. Ms. Adapa also espoused the need for forming partnerships with other diaspora in order to build broader advocacy coalitions. Dr. Rik Mehta, Biotech entrepreneur, Healthcare policy expert, former USFDA staffer, and first Hindu American 2020 Republican nominee for US Senate in New Jersey, echoed similar comments for advancing Hindu points of view in its multi-faceted domains. The question and answer session that followed was very engaging, and evoked a thought-provoking exchange between the moderator, panelists, and viewers.

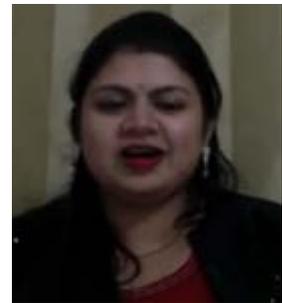
Earnest appeals for donations to endow the HinduPACT initiatives were made by Smt. Renu Gupta, HinduPACT Executive Director for Chapter Development, and Smt. Vishakha

Manek, Healthcare entrepreneur, prominent social worker, and a clinical Registered Nurse. The pressing need for funding the policy research and Hindu advocacy in USA cannot be overstated, and donations can be made at the following URL: <https://hindupact.org/>.



In his concluding remarks, Utsav Chakrabarti narrated emotive stories of discriminations against Hindus, grossly distorted depiction of Hindu views, and Hinduphobia, which guided his engagement with HinduPACT. The program was interlaced with melodious musical interludes provided by Ms. Geetikka Kulkarni, and ended with a lovely Ghoomer song and the rendition of Albeli Sajani song in both Hindi and Telegu.

An estimated virtual audience of 5,000 viewers over the diverse Zoom, Facebook, and YouTube internet platforms enjoyed the gala. Furthermore, the program was streamed (either live or via a dedicated link) by the following media partners: Diya TV (<https://diyatvusa.com/>), Tag TV (<https://www.tagtv.info/>), and Bharat FM (<https://bharatfm.com/>). ■



BIDDING GOODBYE TO 2020

Gaurang G. Vaishnav
Tampa, FL (vicharak@gmail.com)

For time immemorial, mankind has been searching for the “truth”- is time real?

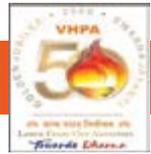
"We can portray our reality as either a three-dimensional place where stuff happens over time," said Massachusetts Institute of Technology physicist Max Tegmark, "or as a four-dimensional place where nothing happens [‘block universe’] — and if it really is the second picture, then change really is an illusion, because there's nothing that's changing; it's all just there — past, present, future." (<https://www.space.com/29859-the-illusion-of-time.html>)

Leaving aside the question of what ‘time’ is to the scientists, we, human beings have to acknowledge that we are conditioned and controlled by time.

We make elaborate schedules to manage time but in reality, while following those schedules, we become slave to the time. We say ‘time flies’ but does it really? When we watch TV or a film in a theater, the screen remains where it is; the frames of a movie move in rapid succession. Similarly, may be the time is like a vast canvass on which our day-to-day life, our ‘schedules’ are projected.

Keeping that thinking in the mind, let us think about the year gone by- the year 2020. Though it has become a ritual to take stock of the year gone by, make new resolutions only to be broken later, such an exercise also serves as a benchmark in human history.

The year 2020 will be remembered for the Coronavirus and COVID-19. The pandemic and its impact around the globe are the stuff of science fiction or a horror movie. It has been a



rude awakening and a big jolt to the self-centered mankind. One couldn't have imagined that the things we took for granted could easily be taken away from us- freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, freedom to eat out, freedom to use public transit, freedom to play outside, freedom to go to schools and colleges, freedom to have parties, freedom to celebrate weddings and other joyous affairs of life, opportunity to attend the last rites of near and dear one- all these were gone in a blink of an eye.

Though ultimately, COVID-19 will be tamed, and people will begin to live more or less normal life, its impact will last for a long time. So many families have lost loved ones. We all remember how in the initial days back in March/April we used to see on the TV screen a three-digit number of total deaths in USA. This escalated to more than 300,000 over nine months and we became numb as it is difficult to comprehend such rapidly increasing numbers. But for those who lost a family member, a father, mother, brother, sister, a child or a grandparent, each of that 300,000+ death is a painful reality, a reality more acute than anything else because they couldn't hold their departing relative's hand or comfort them when they breathed their last. Neither could they, in many cases, be there at the cemetery or crematorium to pay respect and attend religious ceremonies. The Bharatiya community of NJ-NY lost one of its leaders, Shri Ramesh Patel to COVID-19. VHPA lost Dr. Hari B. Bindal, a member of the Governing Council, a renowned Environmental Specialist, and founder of the 'American Society of Engineers of Indian

Origin (ASEI).

Dr. Bindal served as the Environmental Program Manager for the US Dept. of Homeland Security and as the Commissioner of PG's County's Solid Waste Advisory Committee. The President of India honored him with the 'Pravasi Bharatiya Samman' Award in 2017, and in 2019, he received the 'Pravasi UP Ratna' Award, from the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Bharat.

Bharat lost a well-respected amazing singer, S.P. Balasubrahmanyam, Balu to COVID-19.

And hundreds of thousands of people lost their livelihood, jobs and businesses.

VHPA VOLUNTEERS IN SEVERAL STATES WERE ACTIVE IN SEVA WORK RELATED TO CORONAVIRUS. THEY COLLECTED FUNDS AND DISTRIBUTED MASKS, GLOVES AND GROCERIES TO THE NEEDY. SOME OF THE WOMEN VOLUNTEERS SEWED MASKS AT HOME AND DONATED THEM TO THE HEALTHCARE WORKERS.

There were non-COVID related losses to the Hindu society too in 2020. A Seva and humility incarnate senior office bearer of VHP, Bharat, Shri Balkrishna Naik Ji passed away during Diwali holidays in Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, the holy land where Bhagwan Buddha attained Parinirvan, or liberation after death. Here in USA, one of

the early volunteers and a life member of VHPA, Shri Ram Gehani of Maryland passed away in April. He had served on the governing council of VHPA and was instrumental in the growth of VHPA's work in metropolitan DC area.

But there were some bright spots too in otherwise a gloomy and extremely difficult year. On August 5, 2020, almost a five-hundred-year-old dream of the Hindu society to reclaim the land where Shri Ram temple at his birthplace was destroyed and a 'mosque' was built on its ruins on the orders of Babur, the Moghul king, the Prime

Minister Shri Narendra Modi performed the “Shilanyaas”, foundation stone laying ceremony to build a grand temple of Bhagwan Shree Ram in Ayodhya, which became a reality after the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Hindus. This was a historic day, and it gave a big boost to the confidence of the Hindus, especially, coming after several but persistent struggles over those centuries and sacrifices of thousands of lives.



Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America launched two major initiatives in the year 2020. It started HinduPACT (Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective) and a weekly talk show HinduLounge on YouTube. These two initiatives will go long way in bringing issues affecting Hindus front and center and influencing government policy makers at all levels. During this year, another Hindu advocacy organization, CoHNA, Coalition of Hindus of North America was born after a series of anti-Bharat resolutions by city councils and attacks on Hindu Mandirs and Hindu Students bordering on Hinduphobia became a major concern.

VHPA volunteers in several states were active

in Seva work related to Coronavirus. They collected funds and distributed masks, gloves and groceries to the needy. Some of the women volunteers sewed masks at home and donated them to the healthcare workers.

At the end of this year, VHPA also changed its leadership. Dr. Abhaya Asthana, the president of VHPA who has been with VHPA for 26 years and served in various capacities decided to step down to bring in new blood. At the same time, Shri Sanjay Mehta, the General Secretary who also has been with VHPA for more than 25 years emphatically expressed his desire to relinquish his position one year ahead of the completion of his term. This duo has worked in tandem for so many years and led VHPA ably and infused it with new energy. Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America is thankful to them and looks forward to their active role on the Advisory Board. The Governing Council of VHPA unanimously elected Dr. Ajay Shah (PA) and Shri Amitabh Mittal (IL) as the president and the general secretary. These young members have been with VHPA from early age and have the experience needed to continue steering VHPA in the right direction. Thus, while 2020 was a difficult year, 2021 comes with a new promise.

The year 2020 also taught us the value of family as a unit, importance of good friends, joy of simple, home cooked food, possibility of wanting less and finding joy within. It also opened our eyes to the effects of wanton disregard of the nature and abuse of natural resources.

The speed with which vaccines were invented by cooperation among researchers is a testimony to human courage in face of the direst challenges. That is why the hope springs eternal. With the lessons learned, let us welcome the year 2021 with the renewed spirit to make this world a better place to live for all. ■

Prehistoric Rock Arts Discovered in Tiruvannamalai Cavern

M T Saju

Prehistoric rock art in red and white ochre have been discovered inside a rock cavern in Neelanthangal, a remote village in Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu.

There are at least 15 images of animals and other figurines inside the cavern, which is facing threat from vandals. Like many rock art sites in the state, vandals have scribbled their names around these prehistoric pieces of art too.

There are at least 15 images of animals and other figurines inside the cavern, which is facing threat from vandals. Like many rock art sites in the state, vandals have scribbled their names around these prehistoric pieces of art too.

It's difficult for one to identify the ancient figurines and images from the recent 'creations' of the vandals, according to S Balamurugan, tehsildar of Tiruvannamalai, who with a team of four heritage enthusiasts discovered the site a couple of days ago.

"It was not easy for us to identify the prehistoric figurines, particularly those painted in white ochre. People who come here don't know the significance of it. They draw images inside the cavern imitating the ancient pieces of art. They also write their names and initials on the rock wall," said Balamurugan.

South India, housing the second largest corpora of rock art after the central Indian Vindhyan hill zone, contains more than 500 rock art sites in a varied ecological, geographical, geological and ethnographic setting. The rock art sites of Kerala-Tamil Nadu zone, located in the granite-laterite zone, are datable from the megalithic to early historical times.



There are at least 15 images of animals and other figurines inside the cavern

The study of rock art in Tamil Nadu, particularly in the recent years, has attracted the attention of academicians, artists and amateurs from different fields. The curiosity in this ancient form of art has resulted in the discovery of more than seventy-five sites in Tamil Nadu with paintings (petrographs) and engravings (petroglyphs) executed on the surface of rock-shelters. Many rock arts sites in Tamil Nadu are yet to be taken over and preserved, according to S Sudhakar, a member in the team.

"Neither the ASI nor the Tamil Nadu state archaeology department takes any interest when it comes to rock art sites," said S Sudhakar, a member in the team that discovered the site.

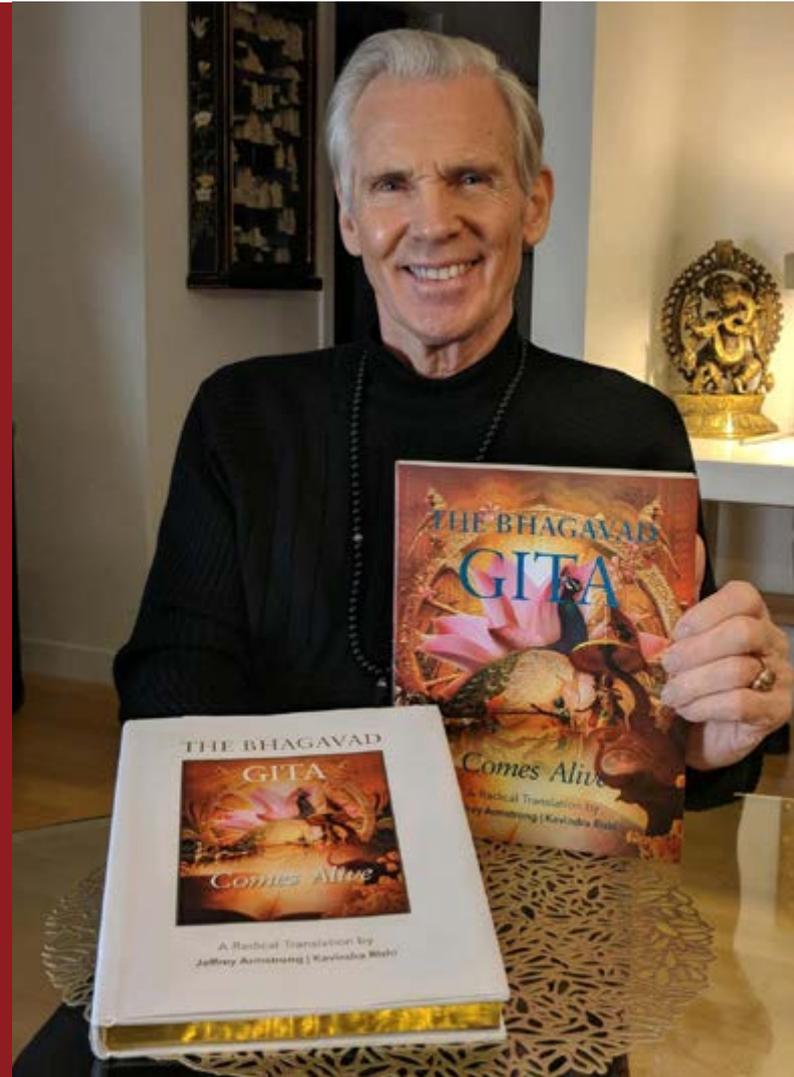
Vandalism is on the rise here as many use the site as a hangout, making use of the remoteness of it. "We are planning to place a sign board to highlight the importance of the site soon," said Balamurugan.

"A detailed study by experts will help understand the significance of the prehistoric art works in the region," he added. ■

Source: https://m.timesofindia.com/city/chennai/prehistoric-rock-arts-discovered-in-tiruvannamalai-cavern/amp_articleshow/76708941.cms

FIRST 'DECOLONIZED' ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA

**AUTHOR SAYS REVERED
SACRED TEXT MORE
RELEVANT THAN EVER**



Vancouver, BC – Ten years in the making, a new English version of the world’s most translated – and mistranslated – ancient Indian scripture could be the purest because it does not include colonial, western or Christian distortions.

Written more than 5,000 years ago – some calculate 7,500 years ago – the Bhagavad Gita is considered the ultimate guide on how to navigate life’s struggles and dilemmas and find meaning within existence. It is the central and enduring sacred text of Hindu and other eastern cultures that can be found in households worldwide.

The book also has prevailing global influence as a “leading book of yoga,” and a following that

includes Arianna Huffington who recently wrote: “The Bhagavad Gita is a source of wisdom in this crucible time.”

TRANSLATED HUNDREDS OF TIMES

Considered a literary masterpiece with universal appeal, the Gita has been translated hundreds of times in 75 languages since 1785. It even provided the premise of the multi-star Hollywood movie, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*.

When local Vedic (Hindu) scholar and linguist Jeffrey Armstrong embarked on being the first Canadian to translate the Gita into English, he thought he was doing a straight Sanskrit-to-English translation. Through his research, he

discovered that previous western versions had distorted the Gita with concepts, words and theories that do not exist in Sanskrit or Indian cultures.

Armstrong spent 10 years “decolonizing” the text to capture it accurately. The Bhagavad Gita Comes Alive: A Radical Translation released this week on Amazon, timed with Diwali celebrations. Armstrong says the book’s teachings are more relevant than ever.

“As we navigate a changing world amidst a global pandemic, climate change, and universal calls for social justice, the Gita offers guidance and lessons that are timely, including about ethical and moral dilemmas, politics, and cooperating with nature,” said Armstrong, vice-chair of the Vedic Friends Association and scholar with the British Board of Dharmic Scholars.

A few of the Christian words and concepts that Armstrong avoids in his translation include: God, heaven, hell, soul, and sin. “These words and concepts cannot be used as synonyms for Vedic and yogic words and philosophies. I offer the Gita in its true essence where I keep key Sanskrit words and use English to support their true meaning and intent.”

For example, the word “soul” originated with the Greeks and is defined as the essence of a human being who has one lifetime followed by consequences. The Bhagavad Gita Comes Alive replaces “soul” with the correct and intended Sanskrit word, “atma,” which means “the invisible, immortal being with no beginning or end.”

TESTIMONIALS

Dr. David Frawley – American Hindu scholar who was awarded India’s third highest civilian honour, Padma Bhushan, by the Indian government:

“There has long been demand for a version of the Gita that corrects distortions. With this translation by Jeffrey Armstrong, who deeply understands the connotations and subtle connections of the Sanskrit terms around which the Gita revolves, we finally have an extensive and profound English version of the Bhagavad Gita.”

Professor Ved P. Nanda: Head of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), a North American non-profit organization that aims to preserve and promote Hindu ideals and values. The University of Denver’s international law department is named after Nanda, who is an awarded adjunct professor at the university. The Indian government awarded Nanda its third highest civilian honour, Padma Bhushan:

“Jeffrey Armstrong has produced a master translation, carefully preserving its intended meaning. The Bhagavad Gita Comes Alive: A Radical Translation enables the reader to unlock the profound messages which are obscured by other versions.”

ABOUT JEFFREY ARMSTRONG

Jeffrey Armstrong is an award-winning author, linguist, and poet. He has been teaching the Vedas for more than 40 years. He also had a successful 15-year career as an executive in Silicon Valley and public speaker addressing Fortune 500 companies. His other books include Spiritual Teachings of the Avatar, and Karma: The Ancient Secret of Cause & Effect.

Media Inquiries: Renu Bakshi 604 787 1873 or renu@renubakshi.com

Book Inquiries: VASA Publishing, Sandi Graham: info@GitaComesAlive.com 604-370-6970

Website: <https://gitacomesalive.com>

Amazon Link: Order the book ■

RAM MANDIR DONATION DRIVE to be Launched on Makar Sankranti

**AFTER THE MARTYRS, NOW IS THE TURN OF TIME-GIVERS AND
FUND CONTRIBUTORS: CHAMPAT RAI**
**SHRI RAM MANDIR NIDHI SAMARPAN DRIVE WILL RUN FROM 15
JANUARY TO 27 FEBRUARY**



New Delhi, December 16, 2020 - The support of every Ram devotee from all over the country will be solicited for the grand temple to be built on the birthplace of Bhagwan Sri Rama in Ayodhya. For this, the Karyakartas of Vishva Hindu Parishad will go from door to door with the venerated

saints and the rest of the people of society. Announcing Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir Nidhi Samarpan Abhiyan, Vice-President of Vishva Hindu Parishad and Secretary General of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, Shri Champat Rai said that in this intensive and extensive campaign from the upcoming Makar

Sankranti (15th January, 2021) to Magh-Purnima (27th February), VHP Karyakartas would reach out to 110 million families of 400,000 villages of the country and propagate and flourish Ramatwa by connecting the common man directly with Shri Ram Janmabhoomi. With the support of people of every caste, creed, sect, region and language of the country, the Ram temple would actually take the form of a Rashtra Mandir(Temple of the nation). Saluting the struggles and sacrifices of innumerable hindus, he called upon every Rama bhakt(devotee) to come forward enthusiastically and proactively for this Ram-Kaaj(cause). For this, we need not only funds-contributors but also time- contributors, he added.

Addressing a press conference in New Delhi today, he said that Hindu society struggled for five centuries to protect the honour of the country by reclaiming the birthplace of Bhagwan Sri Ram. Finally, the Supreme Court accepted the sentiments of the society and the truths of history associated with the temple and directed the Government of Bharat to form a trust.

The government announced a trust in the name of "Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra". The Prime Minister accelerated the process of construction by offering worship in Ayodhya on August 05, 2020.

Sri Rai said that preparations are underway to construct the temple. Engineers from IIT Mumbai, IIT Delhi, IIT Chennai, IIT Guwahati, CBRI Roorkee, Larsen & Toubro and Tatas are working on the foundation drawing. The foundation configuration and layout would very

soon come out. The whole temple will be of stone blocks. Every-one of the three floors will be 20 feet high; the length and breadth of the temple will be 360 and 235 feet respectively.

Shri Champat Rai said that it is planned to make the present and the future generations of the country aware of the truths of the history of this temple. By going from door-to-door, at least half of the country's 1350 million people will be made aware of the historical truths of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Attock to Cuttack, we won't leave any corner

of the country unvisited. The VHP Karyakartas (volunteers) will reach out to every nook & corner of the country, including the Rann of Kutch, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and the mountainous, forest and desert regions of Bharat, to hand out Ram temple literature to people and seek their support. People have a strong desire that Sri Ram's Nativity Temple should come up at His Janmabhoomi soon.

SRI RAI SAID THAT PREPARATIONS ARE UNDERWAY TO CONSTRUCT THE TEMPLE. ENGINEERS FROM IIT MUMBAI, IIT DELHI, IIT CHENNAI, IIT GUWAHATI, CBRI ROORKEE, LARSEN & TOUBRO AND TATAS ARE WORKING ON THE FOUNDATION DRAWING. THE FOUNDATION CONFIGURATION AND LAYOUT WOULD VERY SOON COME OUT.

Sri Rai said that millions of Karyakartas would take part in this historical campaign and the society would voluntarily cooperate and co-create because the work is of Bhagwan (God) and the temple is of Ram. Funds cannot be a hindrance in the work of God. In order to maintain transparency in the financial dealings and transactions, the trust has printed coupons and receipts of denominations of INR 10, 100 and 1000. Karyakartas will issue coupons or receipts according to what the society contributes. The picture of Bhagwan Sri Ram's temple will reach millions of homes. ■

ICONOCLASM IN KERALA TOO



Koenraad Elst

In 1990, the late Sita Ram Goel, historian-publisher from Delhi, in his book *Hindu Temples, What Happened to Them*, compiled a list of some 1862 temple sites where the temple had been destroyed by Islamic iconoclasm, often to be replaced with a mosque. Those are 1862 falsifiable claims, as a scientific hypothesis requires, and none of them has been refuted in the intervening 30 years.

The list was by no means exhaustive. Likewise, historian Meenakshi Jain's 2019 book *Flight of Deities*, listing murtis being spirited away by worshippers in the nick of time to protect them from approaching armies of iconoclasts, is very far from complete. Books as hefty as hers on India as a whole wait to be written on each of India's provinces. Now, a start has been made listing and discussing demolished temples in Kerala.

In Goel's list, Kerala was really underserved, with only a mosque in Kollam and a Palghat fort of Tipu Sultan mentioned in which temple materials were used. (*Hindu Temples vol.1*, p.133). Kerala was not the hotbed on Hindu-Muslim conflict, rather well-off compared to North India that

bore the brunt of the repeated waves of Muslim conquests and iconoclasm. The periods of temple destruction there are mainly the occupation by Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan (late 18th century) and the Moplah Rebellion (1921).

FINALLY

Now, the 157-page book *Destroyed Temples of Kerala, vol.1* (so, more volumes are coming), by Tirur Dinesh, speaks of "thousands" of "destroyed Hindu temples" (back cover) in the far southwestern part of India alone. He zooms in on one case each in 25 chapters, where a "case" or "incident" of iconoclasm usually means more than one temple, or a major temple with a number of dependent smaller temples. (Even in Richard Eaton's list of "80" cases of iconoclasm, nowadays cited for authority by the secularists as "the number of destroyed temples", the ca. 1000 temples destroyed in Varanasi by the Ghurid army count as a single "case".) Nor does a single demolished temple mean that it was demolished only once.

Thus, "Chokkooor Sreerama Kshethra was demolished during the time of Tipu's invasion and again during the Moplah riots (...).Tipu's army entered through the Thamarassery mountain pass, killed as many Hindus as they could, terming them as Kafirs, destroyed the temples all the way and spared only those Hindus who were willing to accept Islam. They demolished nearby temples like Kulikkapra Siva Temple, Kuzhikalaattu Siva Temple, Pongattur Subrahmanya Temple near to Manipuram, etc., and reached Chokkooor Srirama Temple." (p.59-60) The several demolitions of all these temples altogether form one case, here one chapter.

Dinesh has personally visited all the sites and provides original photographs. Every site has a different story, which he relates in detail, often after painstaking original research. The mythical origin of the temple is also explored. Unlike Goel's bald enumeration followed only by the general ideological context, this list provides ample local context.

In some cases, the temple demolition does not date back to historical episodes like the Moplah Rebellion, but took place within living memory, with eye-witnesses still around to be interviewed. The Iringavoor Siva Temple was the victim of a bomb attack on 31 July 1985. The perpetrators were local Muslims descended from Hindus forcibly converted by Tipu Sultan. The Islamic ideology that motivates iconoclasm, that motivated Hyder and Tipu and the Moplahs to it, is still alive and unchanged. But the good part of this story is that this temple is presently being revived. (p.43 ff.)

Where the demolished temples were not replaced with mosques, which are immunized and perpetuated by the Places of Worship Act 1991, the ruins often become the germ of a new temple. Thus, the Malaparambu Maattummal Narasimhamoorthy Temple had already gone through convoluted proceedings (including the return to Hinduism of some Muslims and the menacing resentment of the local Muslims for that) to set up a trust, revive the temple and renovate it, when "in 2005 the temple was released to the trust. Following this they started the renovation process and found the Narasimha's idol as 6 pieces. (...) The fund to

build [the Sanctum] Sanctorum was raised from the native Hindus." (p.110)

Other devotees are now preparing for a revival of the Paruthikkottamanna Mahadeva Temple, after excavating it from the forest that had covered it over in the past two centuries in 2013: "The believers hope that they will overcome hurdles, and well-wishers will financially back them up for the renovation." (p.138) In some cases, the author himself partakes in these revival efforts. At any rate, this way he manages to end sordid stories of temple destruction on a constructive note.

**THE LIST
OF WHAT WAS
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WE MUST BE GRATEFUL TO TIRUR
DINESH FOR BREAKING THE
ICE IN LOCALIZING AND
DEEPENING THE LINE OF
RESEARCH PIONEERED
BY SR GOEL.**

WHY ICONOCLASM?

Why did these things happen, and sometimes not happen?

To start with the former: Islam teaches and commands iconoclasm, with Mohammed himself having set the example, most emblematically with the destruction of the 360 idols in the Kaaba.

That was the general rule to which Hyder, Tipu and the Moplah Khilafatists adhered.

But the latter case, non-iconoclasm, has its part of the truth as well. There is a secularist argument that Tipu Sultan actually patronized Hindu temples. The argument suffers from the usual secularist flaw of willfully confusing an exception with the rule, but yes, next to numerous temple destructions, there are a few such cases. The reason was that "Tipu blindly believed in astrology. (...) Astrologers attributed the continuous defeats met by Tipu to the demolition of temples and suggested the renovation of temples as the only remedial measure. His donations to the temples were a result of this advice." (p.8)

So, the cases where he patronized idol temples do not prove that next to a fanatical iconoclastic Islam there is also a pluralistic Islam (even wrongly extolled as “the real Islam”), as secularists would like you to believe. They only prove that next to Islam, Tipu also held another belief, viz. in astrology. When his belief in astrology, rendered acute by setbacks on the battlefield, did not intervene and Islam had free reign, he was an unmitigated fanatic eager to convert Hindus forcibly and destroy their temples. His letters down to the inscription on his sword testify to this Islamic zeal. As do the mute witnesses: the ruins of Hindu temples and the mosques he built with their debris.

POINTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

A few times the wording in this book is not precise enough, either because the author is a bit careless in doing justice to the evidence available, or because the evidence is still really deficient. Thus, the Chamravattom Kannanoor Pisharath temple “was last demolished at the time of the Moplah riots” (p.39), factual enough, but many temples were demolished several times in India’s long history. So earlier, it was “believed to be destroyed at the time of Tipu’s invasion” (p.38, emphasis added). In a scholarly book of facts, the word “belief” detracts from the power of persuasion; it should be avoided. To be sure, it may reflect a real state of affairs, where a scenario is probable but not altogether certain, there really exist several more options between totally yes and totally no. Still, in the present war with the anti-Hindu forces, anything less than full certainty, even including an honest admission of mere probability, will be exploited by your enemies.

And while we are formulating a bit of criticism, a trivial but non-negligible point is the language of this book. Proofreading by a native speaker or at least someone fluent in English and in the

standard transcription of both Sanskrit and Malayalam would not have been a luxury. For a temple mentioned above, we note the variant spellings Srirama and Sreerama, neither of them standard. The definite article “the”, non-existent in the Indian (and the immense majority of the world’s) languages, is one of the grammatical difficulties in English. In most Semitic, by extension Greek, Germanic and Celtic, and by further extension the Romance languages, it also exists but its use is more predictable; in English it is quite irregular and idiomatic. It makes little difference for a correct comprehension, but not mastering it just looks bad, e.g. here: “The most sacred place of South India, Brahma temple among these, was demolished by Mysore army” (i.e. by Hyder Ali; p.94). It shouldn’t have been too much trouble to change this to “the Brahma temple” and “the Mysore army”. For most readers, stunted language indicates stunted thinking, and thus detracts from the author’s credibility.

CONCLUSION

The list of what was actually done to the Hindus is getting longer, and more volumes inventorying this chapter of Indian history are sure to follow. Every part of India could produce such a volume. We must be grateful to Tirur Dinesh for breaking the ice in localizing and deepening the line of research pioneered by SR Goel.

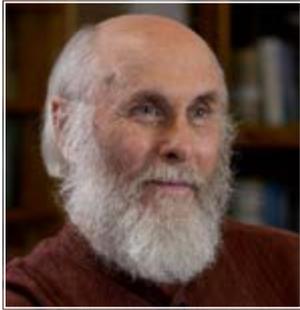
Tirur Dinesh: Destroyed Temples of Kerala, vol.1, Trasadasyu Publ., Trivandrum 2020, 157 pp., ISBN 978-81-939299-2-6, Rs.350 ■

Source: <https://koenraadst.blogspot.com/2020/12/iconoclasm-in-kerala-too.html>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Koenraad Elst, a renowned Belgian Indologist, has written several books on Indian history and culture. He is best known for his writings on controversies in Indian history.

THE FLOW OF SOMA: SOMA AND ANANDA



David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri)

The Vedic ritual reaches its climax in the Soma offering, in which specially prepared plant juices are offered into the sacred fire (Agni) as the drink of the Devas. But this ancient ritual reflects a deeper internal ritual or alchemy of awareness that is its real import. In exploring this process, we will discover many secrets of the practice of Yoga.

Soma is first of all part of a great universal symbolism. Soma pervades the outer world as water in its various forms on the earth and in the sky, as the sap of plants, the vital fluids in animals, the Moon, and even the waters (vibratory field) of space. Soma exists inside ourselves as a psychological principle of feeling, love and inspiration, including as our creativity that we manifest in diverse forms.

Yet beyond this, Soma is a spiritual principle, an aspect of the infinite and a key to immortality. In the state of meditation, the brain and mind naturally secrete a special type of Soma or nectar

of peace and contentment, which reflects this spiritual Soma. Ultimately Soma is the bliss of all existence, the Ananda through which the universe is created and into which it must return. It is this Soma or Ananda that is the prima materia or ultimate substance behind the entire world.

SOMA AND AGNI: BLISS AND CONSCIOUSNESS

To understand Soma, we must understand Agni, the fire, light or energy principle, which is its counterpart. In Vedic thought, the twin principles of Agni and Soma are behind all workings in the universe on all levels. On an outer level, they refer to the great elements of fire and water, but their inner symbolism goes much deeper. Such a twofold division of reality takes many forms like Purusha and Prakriti, Vishnu and Lakshmi, and Shiva and Shakti. Indeed, Lord Shiva, the supreme Godhead, is said to be Agni-Somatmakam or both Agni and Soma in nature. His right side is Agni in nature—fiery, harsh or masculine. His left side is Soma in nature—watery, gentle or feminine. These are the basis of his two manifestations as fierce (ghora or Agni) and gentle (saumya or Soma).

Agni as fire represents light (Jyoti) in the broadest sense, which includes the light of perception and the light of consciousness, not simply light as a material principle. Soma as water (Apas) is the medium on which light can be reflected, which is ultimately a quality of light itself. In this regard Soma is not only water, but the mind and ultimately, the reflective power of consciousness itself.

Soma as a cosmic power is not simply watery in its nature. It has an oily quality that can nourish and sustain fire. It has been compared to ghee (ghrita) in texture. All objects that we see are like fuel for the flame of our awareness. Soma also has a sweet quality and has been compared to honey (madhu). All that we see is like a flower, from which the honey of bliss can be extracted. These properties that can sustain light and provide joy pervade all of space. Great yogis can access them with their subtle bodies (the linga or fire body) and move at will through all the worlds, finding nourishment and delight in all that they perceive.

Soma is the delight which is the counterpart of light. On the deepest level, Agni is the fire of consciousness (Chidagni) that is reflected in the Soma or water of bliss. In this regard Agni and Soma are ultimately the same, two complementary aspects of Brahman.

OBJECTLESS DELIGHT

The highest Soma is the delight inherent in existence itself (Brahman), not simply the pleasure produced by contact with external objects. Soma is the 'pure delight' that we are truly seeking in all that we pursue, not mere temporary pleasure that wears away the senses and is only its reflection. Any happiness that is based upon contact with an external object must be fleeting and must eventually end in pain. This higher 'objectless' joy or self-delight can only be perceived by an internal consciousness beyond the fluctuations of the mind, by the unwavering flame of awareness. We can achieve that through taking the state of the witness (sakshi-bhava), which provides the joy of perception and avoids the pain of involvement. As long as we rely on external contacts to gain our Soma or happiness, we cannot escape from the wheel of sorrow.

We are all seeking some form of happiness in life. We all want lasting bliss. This seeking of

Soma is inherent in the soul, which is ever seeking to return to its origin in God. Similarly, we are always extracting some form of Soma out of our life experience. This essence or rasa is ultimately delight. That is why the Upanishads refer to the Self as rasa (raso vai sah).

The Self is said to be the fluidity of water, the heat of fire, the power of the wind to move, the power of the earth to hold and the power of space to pervade. It is the unique quality or special essence, what is the highest and best in all things. This unique essence is Soma. We discover the Self by going to the essence of our own nature. The Self is the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind. It is the truth of truth. This extraction of the essence from all that we know is extracting the Soma that is hidden in all things. This extraction process occurs in the purification filter (pavitra) of the heart, by the light of which we can discern the heart or core of all things.

THE SEER AND THE SEEN

Relative to the Yoga of Knowledge (Jnana Yoga), Agni is the seer and Soma is the seen. Seeing has a fiery quality and works through light. The seen is the field illumined by light and is actually only light or consciousness reflected externally. Our very power of seeing is a power of fire while all that we see is potentially fuel for it. If our seeing is clear then it can disclose the Soma or Ananda hidden in all that we see. The fire of seeing is able to ripen, cook or bring out the essence of all that we observe. The key to the alchemy of Jnana (Self-knowledge) is that whatever we look at with full attention, with a fully energized Agni or fire of awareness, will yield Soma or delight, not as an external enjoyment but as the very bliss of the Self.

When we look at things directly, without division, their essence comes forth, which is Ananda. This is the state of Samadhi, which is the

flowing of Soma at an inner level. The unity of Agni and Soma is the unity of the perceiver and the perceived. When we learn to look at our inner self wholly and fully, through the practice of Self-inquiry, then the delight inherent in the Self must come forth as the ultimate Soma or self-delight.

THE FIVE KOSHAS

The five sheaths or koshas are a common yogic teaching going back to the Taittiriya Upanishad. Each of these five levels of our nature has its own form of Agni or fire, which is its essential energy. Each has its equivalent form of Soma, which is its main fuel. Agni is the eater or enjoyer, while Soma is the food or substance enjoyed.

1. At the physical level (Annamaya kosha), the digestive fire (Jathargni) is the Agni, and the food and drink we take in through the mouth is the Soma. Higher physical forms of Soma include special rejuvenating foods, beverages and herbs that can revitalize the body, brain and nervous system.

2. At the pranic or vital level (Pranamaya kosha), Pranagni or the vital fire is the Agni and our vital enjoyments of exercise and activity are the Soma. Higher Pranic forms of Soma including Pranayama practices that can revitalize our internal Pranas and balance their energies towards transformation.

3. At the level of the outer or sensory mind (Manomaya kosha), the mental fire (Manasika Agni) is the Agni and our various sensory enjoyments are the Soma. Higher mental forms of Soma include mantra, visualizations

and meditations that bring in a higher level of experience into the mind.

4. At the level of the inner or discriminating mind (Vijnanamaya Kosha), the Buddhi or discriminating intelligence is the Agni and the various principles, beliefs, ideas or dharmas that we pursue in life are the Soma. Special types of Soma for the higher mind include formless meditations on truth, unity, bliss and harmony.

5. At the level of the soul (Jiva or Anandamaya kosha), our inner consciousness (Chitta) is the Agni, and our entire life experiences and memories are the Soma. Special types of Soma for it include the practice of Self-inquiry in which we digest our life-experiences, burning up our Samskaras (internal karmic tendencies) and turn them into pure awareness.

In this way, the soul or Jiva takes in substances, impressions and ideas from the external world and extracts the nectar of Ananda from them, just as a bee gathers pollen from various flowers and turns them into honey. The ultimate result is the essence (rasa) of our experience that becomes the Ananda or Soma Kosha, in which our karmas and samskaras are held. Those who have cultivated the fire of awareness are able to turn all their experience, including that of sorrow, into Soma or Ananda. This takes them beyond the field of all the Koshas.

AGNI IS THE STRIVING OF THE SOUL UPWARD TOWARDS THE DIVINE, WHILE SOMA REPRESENTS THE DESCENDING DIVINE GRACE. AGNI REPRESENTS OUR WILL OR ASPIRATION TO THE TRUTH, WHILE SOMA REPRESENTS WHAT INSPIRES US AND THE GOAL THAT WE SEEK. THAT IS WHY AGNI OR FIRE IS REPRESENTED BY AN UPWARD FACING TRIANGLE, WHILE WATER OR SOMA IS REPRESENTED BY A TRIANGLE THAT FACES DOWNWARD.

AGNI AND SOMA AND THE PRACTICE OF YOGA

In the practice of Yoga, Agni is the fiery Kundalini force that dwells in the root or earth chakra

below. It is the power of aspiration that rises from below and ascends to the heavens above. Soma is the watery nectar that dwells in the crown or head chakra. It is the power of Divine grace that descends from above. As Agni rises, Soma descends. The oily drops of Soma provide the fuel for Agni to aid in its upward movement.

The Yoga tradition teaches us that the crown chakra is the region of the Moon or Soma (Chandra Kanda), just as the lower three chakras are the region of fire (Agni-Kanda). Soma, according to the Vedas, flows in a thousand streams. These are the thousand currents of the crown chakra, the Sahasrara or thousand petalled lotus. Physiologically, Agni relates to the solar plexus, while Soma relates to the soft palate in the head, the source of saliva and other secretions in the head. Balancing these two energy centers is an important Yoga practice.

SELF-INQUIRY AND SURRENDER

Agni is the striving of the soul upward towards the divine, while Soma represents the descending Divine grace. Agni represents our will or aspiration to the truth, while Soma represents what inspires us and the goal that we seek. That is why Agni or fire is represented by an upward facing triangle, while water or Soma is represented by a triangle that faces downward.

Agni represents Jnana Yoga or the Yoga of Knowledge, which proceeds through the heat and friction of introspection and self-inquiry. This is the main upward movement of the soul. Similarly, Soma represents Bhakti Yoga or the Yoga of Devotion, which proceeds through the flow of surrender. This is the main descending movement of grace.

Self-inquiry (Jnana Yoga) is the best, simplest and most direct method for cultivating our inner

fire and reaching the supreme light. Surrender to God or devotion (Bhakti Yoga) is the best, simplest and most direct method for opening up to the flow of grace and reaching the highest delight.

The practice of meditation should always strive to be a dual cultivation of both Agni and Soma, with both deepening perception and joy. A balanced practice should address both Agni and Soma aspects of the practice. Cultivating Agni means cultivating the flame of our awareness, concentration, perception and discrimination. It means increasing the power of the mind to inquire, perceive, penetrate and transform.

In this regard there is a helpful metaphor: The mind is like a wick. Knowledge (Jnana) is like the flame, but Devotion (Bhakti) is the oil (ghee). Without the oil to sustain the flame, it will merely burn up the wick. So too, a mind that does not have that flow of grace or devotion, can be burned up or dried out by the flame of knowledge. We should must remember to keep our Soma flowing. ■

Source: <https://www.vedanet.com/the-flow-of-soma/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri) D. Litt., author of several books, is a western born teacher or guru in the Vedic tradition. In India, Vamadeva is recognized as a Vedacharya (Vedic teacher), and includes in his scope of studies Ayurveda, Yoga, Vedanta and Vedic astrology, as well as the ancient Vedic teachings going back to the oldest Rigveda.

Vamadeva is a recipient of the prestigious Padma Bhushan award, one of the highest civilian awards by the government of India, "for distinguished service of a higher order to the nation," honoring his work and writings as a Vedic teacher, which he received in March 2015.

Kurukshetra: A SHORT VISITOR'S GUIDE



Stephen Knapp
(Sri Nandanandana Dasa)

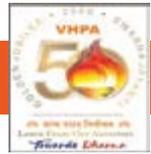
Kurukshetra is a spiritually important and peaceful town which no pilgrim should miss. It is 118 kilometers north of Delhi, or about a four hour train ride or three hour auto ride away. It is most noted for being the place where Lord Krishna sang the Bhagavad-gita, which means the “song of God,” to his friend Arjuna. Therefore, this town is considered the cradle of Vedic culture, part of the battlefield of the Mahabharata war, and the birth place of the Bhagavad-gita. The Bhagavad-gita is a classic text of India and Vedic thought. Every December there is the festival of Gita Jayanti, which is the celebration of Krishna relating the Bhagavad-gita when thousands of pilgrims visit Kurukshetra. The name of the town is believed to have come from King Kuru, the son of Samvarana and Tapati, and the ancestor of the Kauravas and the Pandavas.

Not only was the Bhagavad-gita sung by Lord Krishna in Kurukshetra, but other spiritually important events also took place here. Krishna met his friends and residents of Vrindavana here during an eclipse while He was living in

Dwaraka. He also took bath in Brahma Sarovara and the Sannihit Sarovara water tanks. It is said that the Brahma Sarovara tank is one of the most important in all of India, and that all the holy waters of India are found in the Brahma Sarovara during an eclipse, which is why millions of pilgrims come here to bathe during such an event. It is also said that those who bathe here, live here, visit, or die in Kurukshetra go to heaven after death. In the Kurukshetra Mahatmya of the Mahabharata the sage Pulastya says that even the dust of Kurukshetra will cause one to reach the highest goal. This is the benefit for all who died in the battle of Kurukshetra 5,000 years ago, and one reason why the battle took place here. It is another reason why every pilgrim should visit this holy place. It is also explained that if a person walks eight miles along the Ganga River, he will acquire the merit of performing one ashwamedha ritual. In Kashi (Varansi) one gets the same result by walking only four miles, and only two miles when walking in Kurukshetra.

Furthermore, it is said that Manu wrote the Manu-samhita here. Some people also believe that Vyasadeva wrote some of the Vedic texts, such as the Mahabharata, at his ashrama along the banks of the Sarasvati River when the Sarasvati used to flow through Kurukshetra. This is not to contradict the premise that he also wrote Vedic texts in his ashrama near Badrinatha. The Rig and Sama Vedas may have been written here as well. Even Lord Buddha is said to have visited Kurukshetra.

While we are here, there are several places we want to visit. First of all, Jyotisar is the place



where Krishna related the Bhagavad-gita to His devotee Arjuna. This is about 10 kilometers north of town. It is a pleasant motor-ricksha ride away, and it provides a time to meditate on the occasion when the huge armies gathered on these plains thousands of years ago. Jyotisar is now a small park with a central banyan tree over a small marble chariot that marks where Krishna sang the Bhagavad-gita and showed Arjuna His universal form. The banyan tree is said to be the same tree as when Krishna and Arjuna were present and, thus, the only living witness to the event. There is a large pond of water here that provides for a refreshing atmosphere. There are also a few other small shrines, like an old Shiva temple. It is most pleasant to sit and meditate on the significance of the area and read some of the Bhagavad-gita while visiting.

The history of the Battle of Kuruksetra and the speaking of the Bhagavad-gita can be told briefly. The five Pandava brothers, born of King Pandu, were the legitimate heirs to the kingdom of India. However, when the Pandavas were still young, Pandu died untimely and Dhritarashtra, the head of the Kuru family, assumed control until the Pandavas were grown. However, due to his love for his own sons, Dhritarashtra engaged in many plots and intrigues to eliminate the Pandavas so his sons, the Kauravas, could inherit the kingdom. After many years of tribulations, close escapes from death, and fourteen years of exile, the Pandavas returned to reclaim their rights to the throne. However, the Kurus were not inclined to honor the Pandavas in any way. Even after asking for only five villages, one for each of the Pandavas to

rule, Duryodhana, the chief of the Kauravas, said he would not give them enough land with which to stick in a pin.

After all peaceful negotiations were exhausted, the Pandavas agreed that there was no other choice than to fight. Even Lord Krishna went and personally asked the Kauravas to settle the matter in a peaceful way, but this was not what was destined to be. Each side then amassed huge armies from all over India and beyond. In fact, the Kurus had a much larger army and far greater warriors than the Pandavas. However, the greatest ally of the Pandavas was their great moral and spiritual character, and their friend Sri Krishna, the most powerful personality.

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA IS THE ESSENCE OF ALL VEDIC PHILOSOPHY AND IS COMPOSED OF 700 VERSES AND EXPLAINS SUCH TOPICS AS THE NATURE OF THE SOUL, GOD, THE MATERIAL UNIVERSE, ACTIVITIES AND KARMA, REINCARNATION, THE PROCESS OF YOGA, THE PURPOSE OF LIFE, AND MORE.

When it was time for the huge armies to face each other on the plains of Kuruksetra, there were many millions of warriors, horses, chariots, and elephants ready to fight. Before the battle, Krishna, who was serving as Arjuna's chariot driver and advisor, drove Arjuna's chariot between the two great armies. Seeing the number of friends and relatives on each side ready to fight each other, Arjuna hesitated and felt much grief over the situation. He felt it was useless to fight. He preferred to retire to the forest and live as a recluse and meditate. It was then that Krishna took the opportunity to sing the Bhagavad-gita to Arjuna to show him that action for devotional service and to protect Sanatana-dharma is a higher standard.

The Bhagavad-gita is the essence of all Vedic philosophy and is composed of 700 verses and explains such topics as the nature of the

soul, God, the material universe, activities and karma, reincarnation, the process of yoga, the purpose of life, and more. After all this was explained to Arjuna, he took courage with proper understanding and fought. Thereafter, the war of Kurukshetra lasted for 18 days in which several million warriors died in the fierce fighting. Then the Pandavas were rightfully established in their kingdom, and Sri Krishna had provided His eternal instructions in the form of the Bhagavad-gita for all of humanity. This is all elaborated in the Mahabharata which is composed of 100,000 verses, making it the longest poem in literary history.

When we leave Jyotisar, our next stop is at Bishma Kund, also called Bana Ganga. This is where Grandfather Bhishma fell on the tenth day of the battle of Kurukshetra, but remained laying there until the sun entered the northern hemisphere. The battle was so fierce that Bhishma's back was covered with arrows. Finally, he fell on his back and laid on what appeared as a bed of arrows. Then Krishna and the Pandavas, hearing the news, gathered around him as he prepared to leave this world. Bhishma was one of the greatest and most respected of the warriors on the battlefield. As he lay there, he became thirsty and Arjuna shot an arrow into the ground from which sprang Ganges water to quench Bhishma's thirst. This later formed into what is now a small kund or water tank called Bana Ganga, or Bhishma Kund. Bathing in it is said to give the benefits of bathing at all the holy tirthas. This is also where Bishma gave the teachings of Rajadharma (statecraft) and Anushasana (discipline) to Yudhisthira. Bishma also sang the Vishnusahasranama (The Thousand Names of Vishnu) to Lord Krishna before he departed this world.

Next to the kund is a small temple that has images of Bhishma on the bed of arrows surrounded by Krishna and the Pandavas in

the act of listening to Bhishma as he instructs Yudhisthira on the path of dharma, or spiritual merit. There is also a deity of Krishna in His universal form. At one end of the kund is also a huge 26-foot tall deity of Hanuman. There is also a little temple here of Sita-Rama, Lakshmana, Hanuman, and Durga. When we are finished here, next we'll go to the large Brahma Sarovara tank.

There is another place called Bana Ganga southwest of Kurukshetra in Dayalpur. This is a small kund where Arjuna had stopped to rest his horses on his way to fight with Jayadratha. In order to quench the thirst of his horses, he shot his arrow called Parjanyastra into the ground which generated the necessary water. There is also a temple of Goddess Bala Sundari on the premises, and a large Hanuman image.

Brahma Sarovara is one of the holiest tanks in India and is where millions of pilgrims gather to bathe during an eclipse. One who bathes here is said to receive the merit of performing an ashvamedha ritual, and one is freed from all sins by bathing here during an eclipse. This is where Lord Brahma performed a large sacrificial ceremony and also from where he manifested the earth planet in the process of creation. Legend has it that Brahma Sarovara was excavated first by King Kuru long before the epic battle of Kurukshetra. It is a huge tank (half a kilometer wide and one kilometer long) with an island in the middle connected by a road that cuts through it. On the island is a water well called the Chandra Kupa Well, one of the oldest sacred wells. Tradition has it that in ancient times the water in the well would change to milk during the solar eclipse. Next to the well is a small Radha-Krishna temple where Yudhisthira is said to have built a victory pillar after the successful culmination of the war. This lake is also where Krishna, His brother Balarama, and His sister Subhadra came from Dwaraka to

bathe during an eclipse. Along the side of the tank is a smaller island with the Sarveshwar Mahadeva (Shiva) temple on it.

The streets nearby have a number of other temples that we can visit, such as the Birla Gita Mandir. This has a deity of Krishna in the act of explaining the Bhagavad-gita to Arjuna. Outside is a chariot with images of Krishna and Arjuna on it. Down the road along Brahma Sarovara are other temples and ashramas, many of which are quite nice. You can simply ride down the street and stop to see the ones you want to visit.

Nearby is Sannihit Sarovara, another lake or water tank that is very significant. It is not as large as Brahma Sarovara, but it is fairly big (1500 by 450 feet). Sannihit means the assembly of the entire range of holy tirthas or sacred sites, which is said to happen every Amavas, or eclipse, especially the Somavati Amavas (lunar eclipse). It is also said that all of the sacred holy places gather here on the new Moon day, and that this is where the seven sacred Sarasvatis meet. Performing the shraddha ceremony for the benefit of the ancestors and bathing during the eclipse is said to purify you of all your sins and give you the

merit of having performed 1,000 ashvamedha ceremonies. Lord Krishna also bathed here and met the gopis and residents of Vrindavana when He was present. It is also accepted that it was here where Lord Indra accepted the bones from the great sage Dadhichi, which were so powerful that they were used in making a Vajra or thunderbolt for killing the demon Vritasura.

On the eastern end of the tank are several small temples to Vishnu, Dhruva, Hanuman, Durga, Lakshmi-Narayana, Surya, etc. Across the road is a large, beautiful temple to Lakshmi-Narayana. There are also numerous sadhus found here, and those who merely look like sadhus. In fact, as I walked around the lake on one occasion, I came upon a group of sadhus who, instead of engaging in meditation or reading scriptures, etc., were sitting and playing a game of cards. When I asked them if I could take a photo, a few instantly said no. Playing like a naive tourist, I asked why not, and one answered, "What do you think?" They thought I was going to take a photo and then give it to the newspapers. Of course, I knew why they didn't want their photo taken: They didn't want to be seen that way because they would lose their credibility. This made me realize how few real



sadhus actually exist.

Not far from here is a very impressive, government operated Krishna Museum. Every aspect of this museum is related to the pastimes of Krishna and the various ways to express devotion to Him. The museum has a wide assortment of brass, metal, and wood deities of Krishna, Jagannatha, along with paintings, drawings, sculptures, and artwork from all over India. There was also a life-size image of Mother Yasoda with Krishna and Balarama. It also has an assortment of costumes and dress from different eras of Indian history. This museum is very nicely done and well worth the visit, but don't take any photos or, as I was told, they may take away your camera. There is also a Multimedia Mahabharata and Gita Gallery for all those who are interested. Altogether it is an especially nice exhibit. Also, do not miss the Kurukshetra Panorama & Science Centre, which brings to life the epic battle of the Mahabharata with special acoustic effects. Exhibits are also related to various branches of science like astronomy, medicine, chemistry, botany, and zoology.

Our next stop is Kamal Nabha or Nabhi, which is a water kund said to mark the place where Brahma was born out of the lotus flower that arose from the nabhi or navel of Lord Vishnu. This is located in the old town of Thanesar. The water tank here is not that large and is green with algae, but is very significant. There is only a small shrine with Lakshmi-Narayana deities and a picture on the wall of Vishnu with Brahma on the lotus coming from Vishnu's navel. In the entranceway are a few other small deities.

Another short ride to a different part of town takes us to the Sthaneswara temple and tank. This is also quite interesting and is where the Pandavas prayed to Lord Shiva for blessings to be victorious in the war of Kurukshetra. The water

from the tank is considered sacred and to have healing powers. A few drops of the water from the tank is said to have cured King Ban or Vena of leprosy. The temples around the tank have very beautiful deities of Krishna, Radha-Govinda, Sita-Rama and Lakshmana, Shiva, Durga, etc., and an ancient Shiva lingam. The present temple is said to be constructed by Sadashiva Rao Bhau, the commander-in-chief of the Maratha forces, to commemorate his victory over Ahmed Shah Abdali in the battle of Kunjpura, near Karnal. According to the Vamana Purana, the tirthas of Shukra, Soma, Daksha and Skanda are located in the north, east, south, and west parts respectively of this Sthanu tirtha, but one who visits the linga of Shiva here gets moksha or liberation. The Vamana Purana also says that whoever enters this Sthanu temple, with or without desires, gets emancipation from all karma and attains the supreme seat.

Down the road is the Bhadra Kali temple. This is another Shaktipeeth, or empowered place related to Devi, which marks the place where Sati's ankle fell when Lord Vishnu cut her dead body into pieces as it was being held by Lord Shiva. This was after she left her body when she had been insulted by her father, Daksha, in Haridwar for having Shiva as her husband. A marble sculpture of a right ankle is placed over the well where Sati's ankle fell. It is visited by a large number of devotees.

The Iskcon Krishna temple is in the bazaar in the older part of town. If you can get there in the morning you can have darshan of the beautiful Radha-Krishna deities, which stand about two feet tall, and the smaller Gaura-Nitai deities. You can also attend the arati and have a nice prasadam breakfast. The temple is quite nice and expanding. They also have guest quarters on the top floor where visitors can stay. The number of devotees is small, but they are very friendly and

helpful. In fact, they helped arrange my motor ricksha transportation to see the holy places in town the first time I came to visit Kurukshetra. However, they are building a new and very large temple on the road on the way to Jyotisar, which will be in the shape of a chariot. So many people will be stopping to see this new temple.

Another place to see is the Dharohar Haryana Sangrahalaya, established in 2006, which houses a variety of objects like agricultural and domestic implements and art and craft items from the state of Haryana. It also has archaeological artifacts, manuscripts, wall paintings, folk music instruments, ornaments, weapons, etc., to highlight the culture and rich traditions of Haryana.

There is also the Kalpana Chawla Memorial Planetarium named after Dr. Kalpana Chawla, India's famous astronaut and space scientist. This has been set up by Haryana State Council for Science & Technology for imparting non-formal education in astronomy so anyone can learn more about this form of science. However most shows are run in Hindi language, but when needed, they are shown in both Hindi and English.

There is an assortment of other noteworthy places around Kuruksetra, some of which you may want to visit if you have time. Altogether there are still about 134 important pilgrimage sites that are still known today, of which we will describe a few. For example, the mound called Amin, eight miles outside of town, is where Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, was caught in the Chakra Vyuh military formation and killed during the battle of Kuruksetra, as described in the Mahabharata. And the Karna Vadha trench is where Karna, the Pandavas half-brother who fought against them, was killed when his chariot got stuck there.

About 40 kilometers from Kurukshetra is

the place of Pehowa where the ancient Sarasvati River is commemorated, and is famous for the performance of the shraddha ceremonies for the ancestors. The tirtha of Prithudaka is mentioned in the Puranas and Mahabharata, where Matinara, a king in the Puru lineage, performed many rituals here on the bank of the Sarasvati River, which is now mostly dried up and no longer flows through Kurukshetra as it did during the times of the Mahabharata.

Jind and Safidon are towns where you will find such tirthas as Ram Hridaya where Parashurama performed a spiritual ceremony. At Birhi Kalan near Jind is Varaha Tirtha where Lord Varaha appeared in order to save the earth. Sarp Damam, in Safidon, is where Janamejaya, the son of Maharaja Pariksit, performed a fire sacrifice in order to destroy all the snakes after his father was bitten by the snake bird Takshaka from a curse by Shringi, as described in the Srimad-Bhagavatam. This is in connection with the holy town of Shukratal. If you have the time to do some research, the library at Kuruksetra has a good collection of Vedic literature in Sanskrit and English.

Many of the sites mentioned herein will likely change greatly in their appearance over the next few years because the government plans to spend a lot of money to make these sites more tourist and pilgrim friendly. They plan to make a "Krishna Tour" for the many pilgrims so they can easily see the sites connected with Krishna and India's history. This will include Kurukshetra and many other places in Haryana, but also places like Vrindavana which will also be a part of this tour.

In this way, Kurukshetra has much to offer the sincere pilgrim and also elaborates the significance of the Bhagavad-gita. Some people stay for a day, but Kurukshetra deserves a few days to see and absorb all it has to offer. ■

This article and more information at www.stephen-knapp.com

TERROR IN THE NAME OF GOD AND ALLAH



Maria Wirth

The biggest problem in today's world is terrorism, many political leaders acknowledge. The strange thing is that they close their eyes to its root cause. This closing of eyes is seen as politically correct. Naturally, there is little chance to improve things but it's likely to get worse.

If someone commits an act of terror, he must be motivated. Yet this motivation is ignored, because in most terror cases in our times, terror is connected with Islam, and if someone hints at this fact, he is promptly accused of Islamophobia. Yet Christianity also used terror in earlier times.

In fact Christianity was the first to make the unsubstantiated claim that God has given the full truth only to the Church and everyone must believe it at the cost of their lives. And Islam followed with a similar claim. Terrorism in the name of God started right then, by forcing "those who are wrong" into the "right" faith or killing them. Millions of people were killed – from America to India and beyond.

In primary school I learnt that Islam expanded through "fire and sword". It was a meaningless phrase for me as a child. Only later, it dawned that it involved tremendous cruelty. This cruelty was not restricted to Islam. The Christian 'expansion' and the Inquisition were equally brutal. Indians experienced it firsthand in Goa.

In the 1970s, at University, we debated why religion has caused so much bloodshed. The debate was on 'why' not on 'if'.

In 2000, a change in this approach became apparent. When Pope John Paul II finally acknowledged the cruelty of the Inquisition, and asked forgiveness from God, he did not blame the Church but 'sons and daughters of the Church' who committed 'mistakes'. He tried to absolve the religion and laid the blame on 'misguided' followers.

This same pattern is followed today regarding Islam. When Jihadis attack innocent citizens shouting 'Allah ho Akbar', politicians, Muslim representatives and media declare that those terror acts have nothing to do with Islam but are the handiwork of misguided or deranged individuals.

The reaction is so predictable: "The attack is shocking, revolutive, a cowardly act, but we stand united. We won't let them win", etc.

Then in major cities (provided the attack happened in the West, as lives lost in Africa or Asia don't seem to matter so much) a landmark building is lit up in the colors of the country where the attack happened, candles are lit...

We have gone through these motions far too often and there is something fake about it. The pain of those affected is real. Others may be grateful that it had not hit them – at least not this time. Yet most politicians are not honest.

True, the attacks are shocking and revolutive, but they are not cowardly acts. The Jihadi kills because he is convinced that it is his duty to kill Kafirs – and he is even ready to die in doing what he feels is right. This shows courage. Almost all terrorists are young. It is not normal, nor easy to risk one's life by killing others, unless he is absolutely convinced that the benefit is greater than the cost.

AND WHAT DOES HE EXPECT AS BENEFIT?

Probably he was taught already as a kid or has read it later on the internet that killing Kafirs pleases Allah. By doing so, he can make his life truly worthwhile, and he will be richly rewarded: he will have a better status in paradise than those who did not kill Kafirs.

Now here is where we Kafirs are either cowards or ignorant. We don't dare to point to passages in the Quran, which support his expectation, for example Q 4.95 and ask what it means if not what is written there.

“Those believers who stay at home – having no physical disability – are not equal to those

who make Jihad in the cause of Allah with their wealth and their persons. Allah has granted a higher rank to those who make Jihad with their wealth and their persons than to those who stay at home. Though Allah has promised a good reward for all, Allah has prepared a much richer reward for those who make Jihad for Him than for those who stay at home. They have special higher ranks, forgiveness and mercy. Allah is forgiving, merciful.” (Q4. 95-96).

Imagine a young, hot-headed Muslim reads this – would he not be inspired to make his life “worthwhile”? Even more so, if he has phantasies of becoming a hero with a gun? He probably considers dying as a small price for greater glory. As Sultan Shahin once pointed out, children in madrasas, who often are treated badly, sing songs with the refrain “zindagi shuru hoti hai qubr mein” (life starts in the grave).

Curiously, old, sick Muslims don't seem to be interested in the “higher status in paradise” when it would make much more sense for them. Does it mean, they are more mature and know that the Quran must not be taken literally?

Is it not their and our duty, to save not only the potential victims of future terror attacks but also the young Muslims who are ready to throw away their lives for a promise which won't be kept? After all, Christianity also claims that



only those who are baptized can enter heaven. A comment to one of my tweets recently read: "I don't understand why those religions portray their God like underworld dons. 'If you leave our gang, if you are not a follower of our God, then you will be fried in hot oil in hell'..."

Can a merciful Supreme Being behave like a jilted lover who gives hell to those who love him under another name?

We need to ask probing questions. Those must include the question: why in an area where Muslims have become the majority, the number of minorities keeps dwindling till they become almost non-existent?

Yes, it is difficult to believe that terror attacks have anything to do with religion. Religion is understood to be something good. It is meant to connect us with the Highest and to make us better human beings. We want to believe that the cause for terror attacks is something else. 'All religions worship the same one God. No religion can condone killing others', most of us will say. But is it true?

We need to find out. If we don't dare to do this, we are cowards.

Let's imagine we discover that there are indeed passages in the Islamic texts that condone terror against infidels, what will be the next step?

Then we need to bring in common sense and debate on the meaning of life and enquire into the absolute truth. India has the knowledge and must take the lead in this, because the Christian West is handicapped though many Christians, except those who earn their livelihood from the Church, meanwhile don't divide humanity any longer into 'us versus the rest'. Yet both the Muslim and Christian clergy does. Instead, another dividing line must be drawn: It is the line between humanity and inhumanity.

Terror and hatred for other human beings is

inhumanity. How do we know? Because we have a conscience which tells us what is right and what is wrong. Right is dharmic and wrong is adharmic. Hinduism is based on Dharma and that's why Hindus can never cause terror in the name of the one Brahman or their many Devas. Our conscience is the voice of Dharma which guides us through life. If we listen to it, we realize that the whole of humanity is one family. The life in all of us comes from the same, most powerful yet invisible, source.

Religions which demand that we ignore our conscience and instead believe blindly what they tell us (two of them exist), have an agenda. They want sheep who don't think for themselves and who can be used for their own purpose.

Terrorists are not cowards, but they are not smart. They got the purpose of life wrong and they won't be rewarded for harming and killing other human beings. ■

Source: <https://mariawirthblog.wordpress.com/2020/12/05/terror-in-the-name-of-god-and-allah/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maria Wirth is a German and came to India for a holiday after finishing her psychology studies at Hamburg University. She visited the Ardh Kumbha Mela in Haridwar in April 1980 where she met Sri Anandamayi Ma and Devaraha Baba, two renowned saints. With their blessing she continued to live in India and dived into India's spiritual tradition, sharing her insights with German readers through articles and books. For long, she was convinced that every Indian knows and treasures his great heritage. However, when in recent years, she noticed that there seemed to be a concerted effort to prevent Indians (and the world) from knowing how valuable this ancient Indian heritage is, she started to point out the unique value of Indian tradition.

She may be contacted via email mariawirth12@gmail.com

EMBRACE EVERY SEASON

Words of Wisdom

Siddheshwari Devi (Didi Ji)

TOP TEN REASONS TO LOVE GOD

1. Because He gives without expecting anything from you.

Everyone expects something back from you, even if it is a thank you note, a hug or a smile. God is the only one who keeps giving without any expectation.

2. Because you have every possible relationship with Him.

In the world your mother is only your mother. She is not your father, brother, sister and child along with being your mother. God is mother, father, brother, sister, child and beloved. You are the spirit soul and you have each and every relationship with Him.

3. Because He is the only one who has always been with you.

Wherever the soul goes after leaving the physical body, God goes along as well. He never leaves you alone for even the tiniest moment.

4. Because He will always remain with you.

Countless family members have been with you and now you are separated from them. Even the most intimate worldly relationship comes to an end one day. God, however, has always been with you and will always be by your side.

5. Because He forgives your countless offences. Even though His child has committed countless sins, God forgives everything if His child becomes truly repentant.

6. Because He is always looking at you without blinking.

What if He blinks and at that very moment you decide to surrender to Him? The moment you surrender, He has to destroy your ignorance, burn your uncountable actions, and give you unlimited knowledge. So, He never blinks.

7. Because He has been infinitely patient with you.

There is no end to His patience. Patiently He waits for you to run into His loving arms as you run in the opposite direction. But He waits and waits

and waits. All because of love.

8. Because He is all-merciful.

The only thing He knows to do is to shower mercy on one and all. Even as He punishes His children, He does it to grace them.

9. Because He never forgets you even though you forget Him.

Although you may forget Him, He never forgets to grace you. He is the merciful mother who continues to love her child even though the child may be kicking her.

10. Because His love for you is immeasurable.

It is absolutely impossible to measure the love God has for you. Because of that love He gives you the power of critical thinking. Because of that love He gives you fruits of your actions by taking note of every single thought of yours.

EMBRACE EVERY SEASON

One of the best gifts Nature gives us is the gift of seasons, with each season bringing along its own unique flavor. We can choose to appreciate each season and enjoy it, or completely become oblivious to it and even grumble endlessly about it.

We can take inspiration by observing children who enjoy every season that comes along.

While adults lament the rain that never stops, children have fun playing in the rain and splashing in mud puddles.

While grownups complain about the sudden snowfall, kids shriek with excitement as they slide down the driveway in their make-shift toboggans.

While parents complain to each other about the sweltering heat, children enjoy the simple pleasure of going through the water sprinkler and

getting soaking wet with the garden hose.

While adults bicker about having to clean up so many leaves in the autumn season, children happily dive into the pile of those leaves.

We would do well to enjoy not just the changing seasons of Nature but also the changing seasons of life. Whatever season is yours at this time, learn to appreciate it. Embrace it and enjoy it like a child.

AN ENDING LEADS TO A NEW BEGINNING

We hear and use the expression, "Everything good must come to an end one day." We speak these words with a regretful sigh. We lament the passing of something good that we had in life. It's true that everything good comes to an end one day. It's also true that everything bad comes to an end one day. If a marriage comes to an end, the abuse, fights and arguments between two people also come to an end. If a popular boys' band breaks up, it is the beginning of a solo career for band members. When high school education comes to an end, college life begins.

Rather than grieving the end of something we hold dear, let's celebrate the beginning of something new. When spring comes to an end, summertime arrives. When summer comes to an end, the autumn season arrives. When autumn comes to an end, winter begins. Every season has its own beauty worth noticing and appreciating.

When life as we knew it comes to an end, challenges begin. It's a waste of time brooding over the changes and wishing everything to have remained the same. We should live constructively by embracing challenges and adapting ourselves to meet these challenges. We should also keep in mind that challenges will also come to an end one day.



We reminisce about the 'good old days.' We mourn the days that will never return. While mourning the loss of our past, we overlook the present which is not bad at all. The days of the past had to end for the present to arrive. Appreciate the new beginnings rather than holding on to the past.

The caterpillar must shed its former self for the butterfly to arrive. Every ending leads to a new beginning.

LIGHTER MOMENTS

A simple remedy for turning dull routine of everyday life into pleasure is.....lighter moments. These are moments of easy laughter and playful banter. These are the times when you take a short break and share a joke with a friend or a loved one; when you kick up your feet or soak them in warm water and Epsom salts. These are times you steal from your everyday life and prepare a face mask with turmeric and milk. These are the times you drive to your local Amish community to get the freshest milk from grass fed cows.

Everyone needs a mental refreshment now and then. Think about it! Your mind is working all the time. Even when you sleep, the mind is working hard to produce dreams. There are times when the mind is overloaded, resulting in tensions, worries and anxieties. For the mind to destress itself, it needs lighter moments. So, engage in something the mind takes delight in. No two people are the same. Therefore, decide on what works for you. Even as you plan such an activity, the dopamine levels in your brain start to increase. You start feeling good.

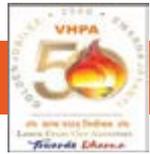
Taking out the time to destress and to regroup is not something frivolous. In many cases it is a lifeline. It will not take away productivity from your life; on the contrary, it will make you more productive. Get up from your desk and stand in the sun for 5-10 minutes. Do some fun stretches in your back yard, or on the park bench. Meditate in the middle of your day. Replace the frown on your face with a beautiful smile. ■

Email: s_didi@radhamadhavsociety.org



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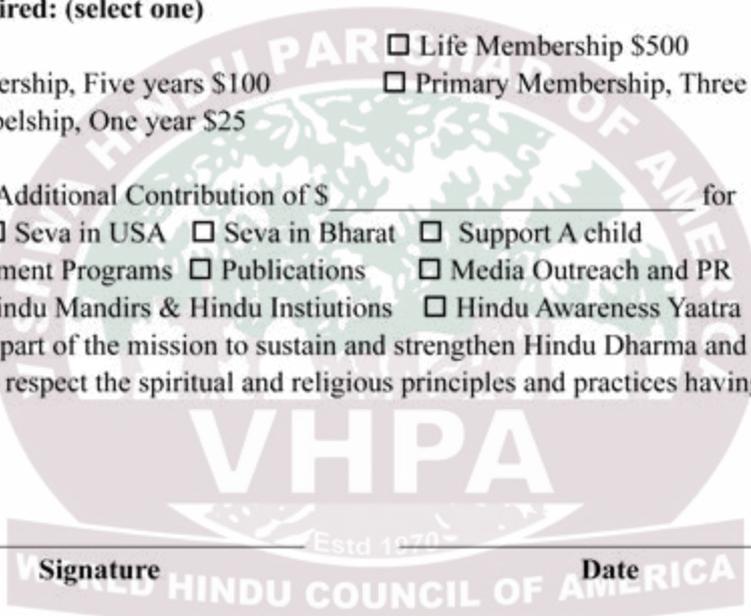
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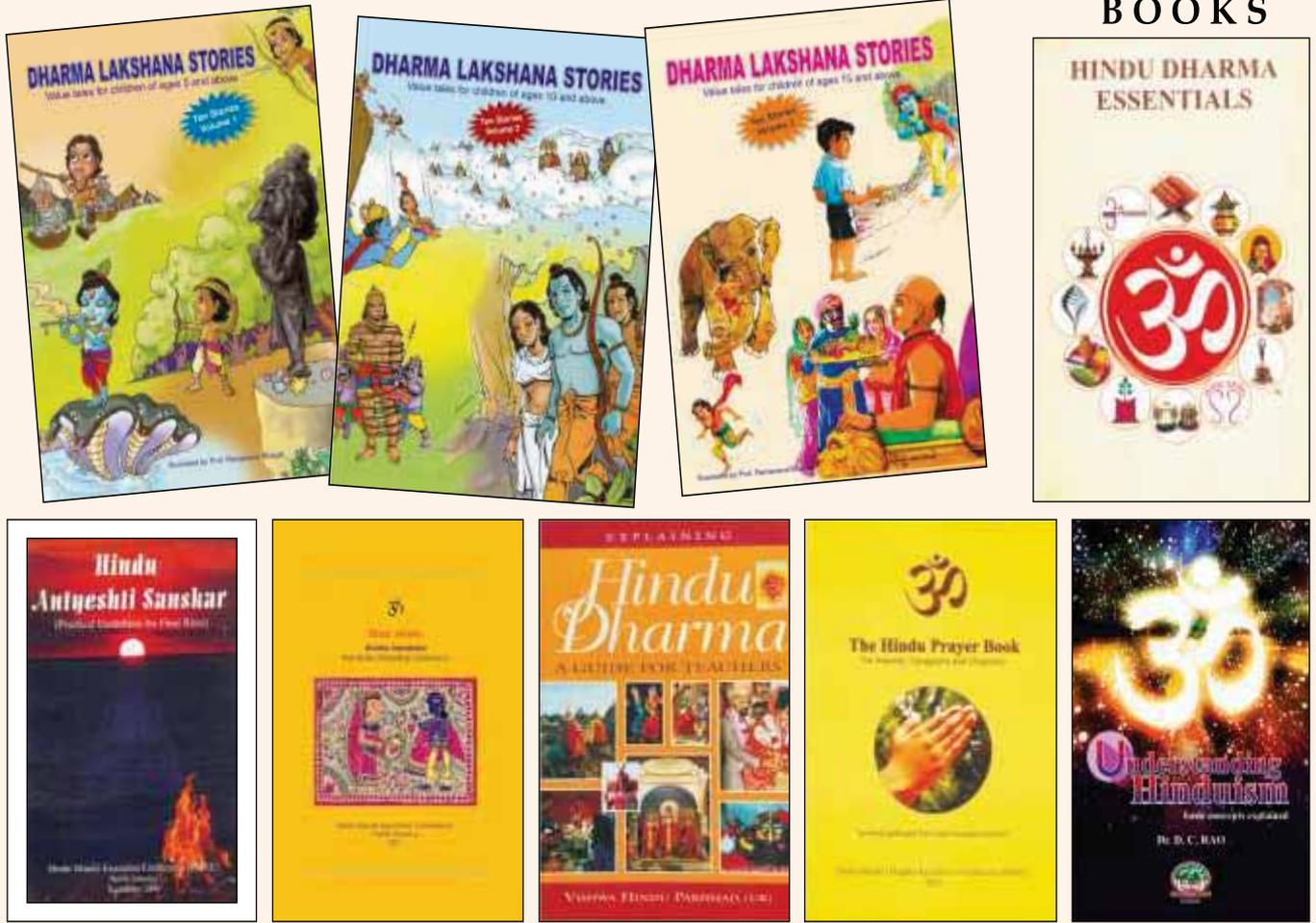
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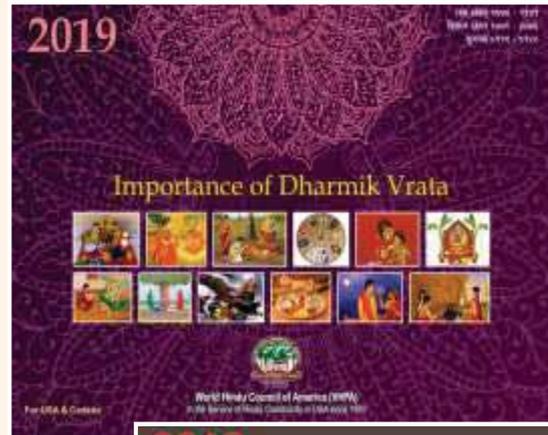
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